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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000303

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STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR  
INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)  
TREASURY FOR JEFFREY LEVINE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2011  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [KDEM](#)  
SUBJECT: SENATE PRESIDENT LAMBERT: I AM NOT A  
NARCO-TRAFFICKER

REF: A. PAP 156

[1](#)B. 06 PAP 828

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons  
1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Senate President Joseph Lambert on February 6 calmly and methodically denied accusations that he had connections to drug traffickers in a two-hour conversation with Polcouns. Lambert acknowledged that suspicions arose as a result of his association with Jean Marie Fourel Celestin, an ally of former President Aristide convicted of drug trafficking in the United States in 2004. He insisted, however, that his relationship with Celestin was purely a political alliance that ended in 2000. Lambert admitted that his native Jacmel was a focal point for narcotics transshipment through Haiti, but sidestepped the issue of whether political figures were involved, rather expressing indignation that the Haitian and U.S. governments were not doing more to stop it. Lambert reiterated his offer (made in ref A) to lead parliament in supporting Haitian-U.S. anti-narcotics cooperation, and also offered to informally consult with Embassy staff. DEA informs us that information provided by Celestin links Lambert to narcotics traffickers in Jacmel, but that this information is insufficient to indict him. As noted in post's reporting on Lambert, he is an ambitious and effective politician with whom we would normally seek close contact. With no immediate prospects for an indictment, post will explore his offer to consult more closely on narcotics issues and see what results. End Summary.

Cards on the Table  
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[1](#)2. (C) Without knowing the subject of the conversation beforehand, Lambert agreed to meet at Polcouns' residence on a day's notice. Polcouns opened the conversation noting that the Embassy had monitored Lambert's performance as senate president with admiration, but that the widespread suspicion regarding his links to drug traffickers made it difficult for the Embassy to establish a closer relationship with him. Could he address these suspicions? Seeming unsurprised and exhibiting no offense, Lambert responded by paraphrasing

Polcoun's concerns. "You're interested in three things: 1) Was I involved in drug trafficking with Fourel Celestin; 2) Who in Jacmel is currently involved in drug trafficking and 3) Will I help you to identify those traffickers?" With that, Lambert launched into a patient and detailed defense of his character over the course of a two-hour conversation, claiming that he always did everything in his power to protect his "personal dignity," and admitting his ambition to take his career "as high as it can go."

Not Me

13. (C) Lambert maintained that accusations against him stemmed entirely from his association with Celestin -- "this is the charge my detractors always make" -- but claimed that their relationship was purely political. As the son of two illiterate peasants, Lambert had to overcome much discrimination during his rise in politics. Celestin recognized Lambert's talent and gave him further opportunity. Lambert served as Celestin's campaign manager and political director from 1997 to 2000, but was never himself a Famni Lavalas (FL) member. "I have always been a liberal, and the FL was illiberal. I knew that Celestin was reportedly involved in illegal activity but I never saw any of that. I did not trust some of his inner circle in Port-au-Prince, especially Patrick Lefevre. I always stayed clear of any suspicious activity. Once during the senate campaign in 1997 I needed 10,000 Haitian Gourds (roughly \$500) to pay our poll watchers. Someone I didn't know came in with cash she said was from the "transport" money. I refused to accept it and demanded the payments come from regular campaign funds. I broke with Celestin in 2000 when he refused to support me for a senate seat after I had given three years of loyal service.

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(Lambert waxed especially indignant at this point.) Can you imagine what his response was to me? I can't support you because you're stronger than I am and too much competition." If Celestin committed all the crimes of which he was accused, Lambert concluded, he was glad he was in jail. (Note: Patrick Lefevre, to whom Lambert referred, was at one point director of the state telephone company, Teleco, reportedly gaining the position through Celestin, and assumed to be complicit in siphoning Teleco money to Aristide. End Note.)

Go Ask the Peasants

14. (C) Any peasant around Jacmel can tell you who the traffickers are, Lambert continued. The flights arrive in broad daylight and traffickers make the pickups in broad daylight, often with police officers. I have people calling me all the time to tell me that a drug flight has arrived. The area around Cotes-de-Fer (west of Jacmel), the district I represented locally, is especially active. I know the police commissaire there is corrupt and I have complained to HNP chief Andresol, but the commissaire is still there. These strips are in the middle of fields -- who owns this land? I know for a fact that Serge Edouard "Perseverance" is in jail in the U.S., but airplanes continue to land on his property. (Note: The interim government also rendered Edoard, a notorious drug trafficker who adopted the business moniker "Perseverance," to U.S. custody in 2004. End Note.)

Let's Cooperate

15. (C) Lambert repeated his offer made to the Ambassador two weeks earlier to lead the senate in bolstering U.S.-Haitian anti-narcotics cooperation. "If we need to pass laws, we'll do it." In the meantime, why isn't the U.S. doing more? Why aren't there more drug agents working in Haiti? Lambert added that he would be happy to meet unofficially with U.S. officials, including DEA agents, as a private matter to share his knowledge and contacts about what was occurring in the

Jacmel region. "I can give you the phone numbers of the farmers who see these planes landing all the time."

Celestin Bio Note

16. (SBU) Jean Marie Fourel Celestin was a doctor in the Haitian army (FAd'H) implicated in assisting the torture of the Duvalier regime's opponents. After former President Aristide dissolved the FAd'H in 1994, Celestin immediately moved to the palace with a small group of pro-Aristide army officers and ultimately rose to become Aristide's chief of security. Aristide nominated Celestin to be chief of police in 1996, but the Haitian senate rejected the nomination because of concerns regarding his character and his involvement in corruption, at the time a surprising rebuke of Aristide. Celestin won a senate seat from the Southeast (Jacmel) department as the Lavalas candidate in 1997, and later became senate president. Observers widely judged his performance to be incompetent and malfeasant. At the request of the USG, the interim government of Haiti rendered Celestin to U.S. custody in June 2004. The U.S. district court in Miami convicted him of conspiracy to traffic cocaine and money laundering later in the year. Celestin told DEA agents after his conviction that he believed Lambert was involved in drug trafficking in Jacmel during their association.

Comment

17. (C) Lambert presents a dilemma for the USG. Under normal circumstances we would seek close contact with this skilled and ambitious politician who is aiming for the presidency. Our DEA office informs that though additional debriefings of Celestin and other Haitian narcotics traffickers in the U.S. may develop more information regarding Lambert's activities, conclusive information that might lead to an indictment is far from certain. Whatever Lambert's actual involvement in

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criminal activities, he is no angel, having hitched his star at one point to one of the most unsavory figures in recent Haitian history and come to power in a region awash in proceeds from narcotics trafficking. At the very least, we can assume he has adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" attitude toward his political and business allies. As president of the national assembly, he has assiduously avoided taking positions on the numerous cases of suspected corruption raised by other parliamentarians, clearly having concluded there is no political advantage in working to uncover corruption. Regarding the most recent charges raised by Senator Jean Gabriel Fortune that Socabank executives bribed senators to impede an investigation (ref A, and septel), Lambert blandly told Polcouns that Fortune was isolated and would remain so unless he could produce proof -- unlikely if Fortune receives no support from parliamentary leaders. Nevertheless, Lambert has been a voice of reason on other issues, and has worked hard to ensure that the senate meets its constitutional duties in a responsible manner. Post will follow up on Lambert's offer to engage in further discussion, if not to clarify his past, then at least to see what future cooperation produces.

SANDERSON